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WOODCOCK'S LITTLE GAME :

A Comedy-Farce,

IN TWO ACTS.

BY

JOHN MADDISON MORTON,

(Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society),

AUTHOR OF

Lend me Five Shillings, Three Cuckoos, Catch a Weazel, Where there's a Will there's a Way, John Dobbs, A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion, Going to the Derby, Your Life's in Danger, Midnight Watch, Box and Cox, Trumpeter's Wedding, Done on Both Sides, Poor Pillicoddy, Old Honesty, Young England, King and I, My Wife's Second Floor, Who do they take me for? The Thumping Legacy, Milliners' Holiday, Wedding Breakfast, Irish Tiger, Attie Story, Who's the Composer? Who's my Husband? Slasher and Crasher, Prince for an Hour, Away with Melancholy, Waiting for an Omnibus, Betsy Baker, Who Stole the Pocket-Book? Two Bonnycastles, From Village to Court, Grimshaw, Bagshaw, and Bradshaw, Rights and Wrongs of Women, Sent to the Tower, Our Wife, Brother Ben, Take Care of Dowb—, Wooing One's Wife, Margery Daw, The Double-Bedded Room, the "Alabama," Drawing Rooms, Second Floors, and Attics, &c., &c.

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WOODCOCK'S LITTLE.

First performed at the Royal St. Jam
(Under the management of Mr. Benjamin
On Thursday, 6th October, 1864.

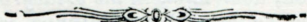
Characters.

MR. WOODCOCK.. Mr. CHARLES
MR. CHRISTOPHER LARKINGS ... Mr. H. J. M
MR. ADOLPHUS SWANSDOWN..... Mr. J. JOHNST
DAVID Mr. W. CHAMBER
MRS. COLONEL CARVER..... Mrs. FRANK M
MRS. WOODCOCK Miss FANNY HERR
MRS. LARKINGS Miss WESTWORT

MODERN COSTUMES.

Time in Performance—One Hour.

WOODCOCK'S LITTLE GAA



ACT I.

SCENE.—*An Apartment in the house of Mrs. Colonel Carver at Stow-on-the-Wold, fire-place in c., doors, R. and L. of it; another door R. 2. E.; a sofa, L.; at L. a window; table, c., with writing materials; chairs, &c., &c.*

DAVID *in livery and wearing a large wedding favour, is seated at little table, writing.*

DAVID. Let me see what I ha' written! (*reading letter*) "Dear Cousin Jane, I write this from the little town of Stow-on-the-Wold, in Gloucestershire—last week the population amounted to 2719, but as soon as master and me arrived, it suddenly shot up to 2721—the church bells have been ringing all the morning in honour of my master's marriage with Miss Caroline Anastasia Sophia Elizabeth Carver, which is now being solemnized"—(*noise of shouting and hurrahing heard*) hey-day! (*jumps up and looks out of window*) it be all over, and here comes the bride and bridegroom! (*shouts repeated—DAVID, in his enthusiasm waving his arm out of the window and hurrahing with all his might, then coming down*) Poor master! he's gone and done it now, and no mistake! (*listening*) Here comes the wedding party—I must finish my letter to Cousin Jane by-and-bye! (*putting letter in his pocket*)

MRS. WOODCOCK, MRS. COLONEL CARVER *in bridal attire, and two BRIDESMAIDS enter at door R. C.*

MRS. C. Don't agitate yourself, my darling child, it is rather a nervous affair, I know, but it's all over now—nothing could be better, you got through it charmingly.

BRIDESMAIDS. Oh, yes, charmingly!

Mrs. C. A little repose, a mouthful of sponge cake and glasses of sherry will soon compose you. Ladies, support your precious charge—come. *Exeunt, door R. 2 E.*

WOOD. (to host) This way, my dear friend.

Enter WOODCOCK, door R. 2., in his bridegroom's costume, followed by two or three MALE FRIENDS, with whom he is shaking hands in succession.

I'm obliged to you—very much obliged to you, indeed, for seeing me through the awful—I mean the interesting ceremony! You'll excuse my following you to the dining room; you'll find my respectable bride and her blushing mother there—no—I mean—really, what with the excitement, the agitation, the—the——

FRIENDS. (laughing) Ha, ha! of course!—all right, old fellow—ha, ha, ha! *Exeunt, R. 2 E.*

WOOD. (coming slowly down—after a short pause) It's all over! there's not the slightest doubt about it's being all over! the knot is tied, and I am fairly launched on the sea of matrimony! I felt uncommonly nervous at first, and then, to make matters worse, I thought I never should have got my white kid gloves off; and yet they were quite loose when I put them on. I can't imagine what made them shrink so, unless it was the state of nervous excitement they were in—I mean, I was in! 'Pon my life, after all, a wedding in a country town is a very jolly affair! In London, a couple walk into church and out again, and it makes no more sensation than if they went into a pastrycook's and bought a bun a piece! but in the country it creates a general excitement—the bride and bridegroom become objects of universal sympathy—I mean, curiosity—everybody wishes them joy, at least they say they do! In short, as I said before, it's a very jolly affair! I shouldn't mind being married two or three times a week for a considerable time to come. (seeing DAVID) Ah, David!

DAVID. (sighing, and very seriously) So, you be really married, sir?

WOOD. (assuming a very hilarious manner) Yes, David! quite married! You may look at me with the perfect

conviction that you are contemplating the portrait of a gentleman thoroughly, totally, and completely married. (DAVID turns away to hide his laughter) You needn't turn your head away, David. I don't mind your laughing. I'm laughing myself, ha, ha, ha. (*forcing a very loud laugh—then after a short pause*) It does seem funny though, doesn't it, David?

DAVID. (L. C.) Yes, sir! it is a rum go and no mistake!

WOOD. I said nothing about a "rum go," David,—I limited myself to the expression "funny!"

DAVID. Only to think of *your* settling down into a respectable member of society! Dear, dear, when I think of your desperate, wild, audacious capers——

WOOD. Hush, David! not so loud! my respected mother-in-law might hear you; and between you and me Mrs. Colonel Carver is rather a formidable sort of person!

DAVID. Ees, sir! she *has* a stiffish, frumpish look with her!

WOOD. I said nothing about "stiffish and frumpish," David,—I limited myself to the expression "formidable." As you say, David, I have been a sad scapegrace—a desperate rascal—but when a man has been cutting capers and nothing but capers for twenty years, it's high time he cut them altogether—in plain English, I felt I had had my *whack*, and that's why I've just married Miss Caroline Anastasia Sophia Elizabeth Carver!

DAVID. Well, sir, they do say a reformed rake makes the best husband, and you certainly had a regular good "innings" at it.

WOOD. I said nothing about "innings," David,—I limited myself to the expression "*whack!*" Has anything been sent from the railway station?

DAVID. Yes—sir, three parcels—here they be, sir! (*three brown paper parcels are on the table*)

WOOD. (*taking one parcel and opening letter, which is fastened to it*) "Two morning gowns in merino—best quality, quilted and lined,—cords and tassels as to order," that's all right; now the other parcels, David—(*opening the papers attached to them*) "Three woollen smoking caps, three cloth ditto, three silk ditto, three velvet ditto"—all right. (*opening third paper*) "Twelve pairs of slippers

to measure, three lined with fur, three with flannel, &c., &c." Quite correct.

DAVID. Morning gowns, caps, and slippers! Why, I never seed you with one or the other in all my life, never!

WOOD. Exactly; because, hitherto, my existence has been passed in coats that cramped my body, hats that pinched my head, and boots that crippled my feet! But that's all over, David; to-morrow I insert my body into a morning gown, my head into a cap, my feet into a pair of slippers, and in that easy and unencumbered state I sink into a comfortable arm chair for the remainder of my existence. Not a bad notion, eh, David?

DAVID. I call it a first-rate dodge, sir!

WOOD. I said nothing about a "dodge," David; I limited myself to the expression "notion." That being the case, David, I hereby convey, transfer, and make over to you from the time being my entire stock of dress coats, ditto trousers, ditto waistcoats, white neckcloths, black hats, and patent leather boots.

DAVID. Oh, thank'ee, sir, thankee!

MRS. LARKINGS. (*without*) Don't trouble yourself! I dare say you've plenty to do on such a day as this.

WOOD. Heyday! see who it is, David.

DAVID. (*looking off at R. C.*) It be a lady, sir. Lor! how I should laugh if it was one o' your old London sweethearts come down to forbid the banns—ha, ha, ha!

WOOD. Hold your tongue, sir, and shew the lady in!

As DAVID goes up, enter MRS. LARKINGS, at door R. C., in travelling costume.

DAVID. (*running back to WOODCOCK, and aside to him*) All right, sir—I never seed her afore!

WOOD. Leave the room! (*DAVID runs out—WOODCOCK advances to MRS. LARKINGS*) Madam, may I—eh? yes—Mrs. Larkings!

MRS. L. Yes! in *propria persona*. Well, am I too late? I see I am. You're married? I see you are. (*looking at WOODCOCK and then bursting into a laugh*) Ha, ha, ha! I can't help laughing!

WOOD. So it seems. Yes, fair lady. I entered the holy

state of wedlock exactly seventeen minutes and a half ago.
(*looking at watch*)

MRS. L. I should so like to have seen you! what fun it must have been—ha, ha, ha!

WOOD. (*aside*) What does she mean by "fun?" and what *can* she be laughing at? (*aloud and assuming a very solemn manner*) Mrs. Larkings, if you allude to the solemnization of the nuptial rites, I saw no fun in it.

MRS. L. No, of course *you* didn't! ha, ha, ha! but tell me how is—how is Mrs. Woodcock? Ha, ha, ha!

WOOD. (*aside*) Mrs. Larkings is gradually becoming unpleasant.

MRS. L. Of course I couldn't allow the dear girl to be married without wishing her joy, poor thing.

WOOD. (*aside*) What does she mean by "poor thing?"

MRS. L. So I took the express train, and here I am! I suppose she was dreadfully agitated, poor thing?

WOOD. (*aside*) That's *two* poor things! (*aloud*) Agitated! not she; she was all animation—all joy—all——

MRS. L. Yes, yes! she naturally would be *at first*, poor thing.

WOOD. (*aside*) Another "poor thing," and Mrs. Larkings and I shall have a row.

MRS. L. Well, as I have unluckily arrived too late to witness the ceremony—I'd have given anything to have seen you—ha, ha! (*laughing immoderately*) You don't mind my laughing, do you?

WOOD. Not at all; it's rather pleasant than otherwise!

MRS. L. All I can do is to give the bride and bridegroom my blessing, and go back by the next train to London!

WOOD. And to Larkings! By-the-bye, how is *your* Christopher? I hope your Christopher is still the *same* fond, indulgent Christopher you've always found your Christopher.

MRS. L. (*enthusiastically*) He's a darling! we are happy as the day is long! and no wonder—we married for love; our tastes, our opinions are the same, and what is still more important, we are nearly the same age—Christopher is twenty-four; I am twenty-two! now between you and Caroline the gap is much wider.

WOOD. The what?

MRS. L. The gap! *she* is under twenty, while you—how old shall we say? (*smiling*)

WOOD. (*very quietly*) Thirty-nine!

MRS. L. Oh, that's the age you've decided on, eh? well, if you wish it, we'll say thirty-nine! (*smiling again*) I'd better tell Christopher in case he might let the cat out of the bag! (*smiling*)

WOOD. (*aside*) Pleasant creature! very! (*aloud*) Yes, Mrs. Larkings—and at thirty-nine I think it time for a man to marry.

MRS. L. Then why didn't you? (*smiling*)

WOOD. I *am* married! at least, such is my impression.

MRS. L. Yes, yes! but I don't mean *this* thirty-nine! your other thirty-nine! your *first* thirty-nine! (*smiling*)

WOOD. (*aside*) Her sex protects her. (*aloud*) I repeat that having reached the age of thirty-nine, and having moreover, sufficiently enjoyed what is called "life"—

MRS. L. You determined to marry and settle down quietly, and all that sort of thing—exactly! that's intelligible enough, as far as you are concerned; but—your wife?

WOOD. My wife? Well? what?

MRS. L. She *hasn't* enjoyed what is called "life."

WOOD. Eh? no—of course not; but—

MRS. L. You intend that she *shall*! of course! indeed, Mrs. Colonel Carver writes me word that she has arranged a delightful wedding trip for you.

WOOD. Has she? (*aside*) That's kind of Carver! very!

MRS. L. Yes! Brussels, Switzerland, Italy, &c., &c., &c.; she hasn't quite settled which.

WOOD. Hasn't she? to tell you the truth no more have I. (*aside*) I shall seize the earliest opportunity of giving Carver notice to quit.

MRS. L. With a young and blooming bride for a companion, how delightful it will be! The Alps! Mount Vesuvius! the Colosseum at Rome! —

WOOD. Yes, very delightful; but very fatiguing; besides, I've seen it all. I know Switzerland and Italy, just as well as I do St. Martin's Church. I admit I've only seen the Colosseum at Rome, twice; but as on my *second* visit I found it in exactly the same state as on my

first visit, I've no wish to pay it a *third* visit, merely to establish the fact that on *my* third visit, I found it in exactly the same state as on *my* second visit.

MRS. L. But your *wife* hasn't seen it.

WOOD. What of that? I can describe it to her, can't I? besides, I married to stop at home, not to go abroad! in a word, Mrs. Woodcock, like a sensible woman, entirely approves of the programme I have drawn up for our connubial existence. (*taking paper out of his pocket*) Here it is—I haven't consulted her about it, but she entirely approves of it, nevertheless. In the morning she'll attend to her household duties, while I go out fishing—I'm very fond of fishing! After dinner she'll do a little gardening, water the plants, pull up the weeds, kill the caterpillars, while I smoke my cigar, and—look on. In the evening she'll take her work, darn the stockings, sew on buttons, and so on, while I take a nap in my arm chair. Then we wind up with a lively game at dominoes, or “double dummy,” have a light supper—pork chops, or a basin of gruel, and—retire! (*throwing paper on the table*)

MRS. L. (*smiling*) Very charming, indeed! but pray be cautious! if you plunge poor dear Caroline too suddenly into such a vortex of gaiety and dissipation, I'm afraid it will be too much for her! (*satirically*)

WOOD. (*aside*) What Larkings could possibly see in this woman, I can't imagine!

MRS. L. One word more! now, Mr. Woodcock! look at me, Mr. Woodcock! When Mrs. Colonel Carver consented to your marriage with ~~her~~ daughter, was she acquainted with your previous career, Mr. Woodcock? your long catalogue of follies and extravagancies, Mr. Woodcock?

WOOD. (*alarmed and anxiously*) Hush!

MRS. L. Your notorious reputation for gallantry, Mr. Woodcock?

WOOD. Hush—hush! don't speak so loud! (*looking round, then in a low tone to MRS. LARKINGS*) I'll tell you how it happened! You see, we were two Woodcocks—in fact, a brace of Woodcocks, Benjamin and Marmaduke. I'm Marmaduke, from which you may infer with a tolerable degree of accuracy that my brother was Benjamin!

Well, Benjamin was always one of the quiet going sort, in short, a serious young man; in fact, he was known as the "tame Woodcock," because he was what is called decidedly "slow;" now I was called the "Wild Woodcock," because——

MRS. L. You were decidedly "fast!"

WOOD. Yes! Well, when Mrs. Colonel Carver made the usual enquiries as to respectability, moral character, and all that sort of thing—she somehow or other stumbled on the wrong Woodcock—the tame one instead of the wild one—and——

MRS. L. And you took advantage of her mistake? Fie, fie, Mr. Woodcock! I couldn't have believed it of you.

WOOD. The very words I said. "Woodcock," said I, "I couldn't have believed it of you." But you won't betray me, my dear and highly valued friend? you won't go and dash the cup of connubial bliss from my lips? because I have seen Mrs. Colonel Carver turn very red in the face at the merest trifle, and—here she comes. *(with an imploring look at MRS. LARKINGS)*

Enter MRS. CARVER, R. 2 E.

MRS. C. Mrs. Larkings here? where is she? Ah, my dear, delighted to see you! and yet I've half a mind to scold you for arriving so late; we've been obliged to get married without you, haven't we, Mr. W.? *(crossing to WOODCOCK)*

WOOD. Yes, Mrs. C.!

MRS. L. Tell me—how is dear Caroline?

MRS. C. Very well, but very agitated—and no wonder *(seeing WOODCOCK, who is approaching, and in a severe tone of astonishment)* Mr. W.!

WOOD. *(bothered)* Yes, Mrs. C. *(MRS. CARVER motions him to keep at a distance, WOODCOCK retreats quite bewildered)*

MRS. C. *(to MRS. L.)* Go to her, my dear! you'll find the dear child in her room, exchanging her bridal attire for her travelling dress.

WOOD. *(overhearing, L. c.)* Umph! Travelling dress? did you say "travelling dress?"

MRS. C. Yes, Mr. W.! but I forgot, you were to know nothing about it! (*to* MRS. LARKINGS) I think we arranged that Mr. W. should know nothing about it?

MRS. L. (R. C.) Of course not! our object was to give him an agreeable surprise. (*smiling*)

WOOD. Our object?—then (*crosses to* MRS. LARKINGS) you joined in this charming little plot, eh? ha, ha! (*forcing a laugh*)

MRS. C. Joined in it? She concocted it!

WOOD. Did she? ha, ha! (*with a savage grin at* MRS. LARKINGS)

MRS. C. Yes; why don't you thank her, Mr. W.?

WOOD. (*sulkily*) I do. (*very savagely, to* MRS. L.) I'm obliged to you. Do you hear?—I'm obliged to you.

MRS. L. (*smiling satirically at* WOODCOCK) I am thanked sufficiently already, in having suggested a proposal, which evidently gives you so much satisfaction! And now I'll join dear Caroline!

MRS. C. Do. Mr. W.! (WOODCOCK *takes no notice—very loud*) Mr. W!

WOOD. (*sulkily*) Well!

MRS. C. Hand Mrs. Larkings to the door.

WOOD. Eh—very well. (*taking hold of* MRS. LARKING'S *hand*) Come along! (*pulling her after him to door, R. 2 E., and then pointing to it*) There you are! (*looking fiercely at* MRS. L., *who bursts out laughing in his face and goes out—WOODCOCK, buttoning up his coat, and with an air of resolution*) I don't care—though it should come to a fight between Carver and me, I will not pay a third visit to the Colosseum at Rome.

MRS. C. (*anxiously watching* MRS. LARKINGS *out, and then throwing off her former stiff and disguised manner*) Done at last! (*looking knowingly at* WOODCOCK, *and shaking her head playfully at him*) Ah!—ah!

WOOD. (R. C., *astonished—aside*) What the deuce is the matter with Carver?

MRS. C. (L. C., *still in the same playful manner*) And has Marmy been deceived—has Marmy been taken in?—he! he! he!

WOOD. (*aside*) I see, Carver's been at the sherry!

MRS. C. Come here, Marmy! you don't mind me calling

you Marray? Marmaduke is such a mouthful, whereas, Marmy is——

WOOD. Mrs. Carver, you're at liberty to Marmy me as much as you think proper, but allow me to observe, that having already paid two visits to the——

MRS. C. Yes, yes! now, listen to me! in a word, I am not the woman you take me for!

WOOD. Eh? you're not Mother Woodcock?—I mean, Mrs. Woodcock's mother?

MRS. C. Pshaw! I don't mean that! in short, Marmy, you have repeatedly said to yourself—don't deny it—“What a regular wet blanket I shall have for a mother-in-law.”

WOOD. No, no! I solemnly protest that—(*aside*)—I have said so no end of times!

MRS. C. You are mistaken, Marmy! that austerity of deportment—that rigidity of manner was all assumed. Listen! You see this brooch? (*pointing to one in her dress*) It contains the portrait of the late Lieutenant-Colonel Carver, done in oil.

WOOD. Carver done in oil? Yes!

MRS. C. He was a very handsome man.

WOOD. Was he? You're quite right to mention it.

MRS. C. Especially on horseback.

WOOD. Then I should certainly have had him taken on horseback!

MRS. C. He vowed that he had never loved before!

WOOD. Of course! ha, ha! that's what they all say! ha, ha! (*forgetting himself*)

MRS. C. (*astonished*) Marmy!

WOOD. I mean to say, I've heard say that's what they all say—that's all I say!

MRS. C. I believed him, and we were married! That very day, Marmy, he retired on half-pay!

WOOD. Did he though? and, how old was Carver done in oil?

MRS. C. Thirty-nine!

WOOD. You mean, he said he was thirty-nine. Ha, ha! I've known lots of fellows who say they're thirty-nine when in fact they—never mind!

MRS. C. I was under twenty, had been strictly and

severely brought up—is it then to be wondered at that I yearned, I may say, panted for those gaities, those amusements so natural to my age? But, alas! it was not to be, for while I was revelling in the anticipation of entering into what is called “Life,” he told me, and I repeat his own unfeeling selfish words, that he had had his *whack*. (*WOODCOCK looks astonished*) Whack! such a vulgar expression!

WOOD. Low! very low, indeed! a colonel, especially a colonel on horseback, ought to have been above it!

MRS. C. But that wasn't all; he actually had the barbarity, on our very wedding day, to draw up what he called a programme of our matrimonial existence, (*WOODCOCK still more astonished, suddenly remembers his own programme, which is lying on the table*) in which I was condemned to the dull monotony of household duties.

WOOD. (*aside*) How very odd. I wonder if there was anything in it about killing buttons, and sewing on caterpillars.

MRS. C. While *he*, forsooth, was to enjoy himself; go out fishing, smoke his cigar, and take his nap in his arm chair. (*angrily*)

WOOD. (*aside*) This is a very singular coincidence; because, I'll take my oath, I never saw Carver's programme! (*he has gradually approached the table, and, watching his opportunity, suddenly snatches the paper off it, and crams it into his pocket*)

MRS. C. What's the matter?

WOOD. Nothing!

MRS. C. But *that* wasn't all; he actually expressed his intention of laying aside his splendid regimentals—those regimentals that I loved so much, and wearing nothing but those odious abominations called morning gowns for the remainder of his existence. (*here WOODCOCK, watching his opportunity, opens table drawer, and thrusts in the parcel containing the morning gowns, then slams the drawer*)

MRS. C. What is the matter?

WOOD. Nothing.

MRS. C. (*going to table, and standing on the side opposite to WOODCOCK, who is eyeing the remaining two parcels with anxiety*) But *that* wasn't all! (*hanging her hand on one*

of the parcels to Woodcock's great alarm) Hanging up his noble helmet in the hall, and giving his military boots to his servant, he inserted his head into one of those atrocities called smoking caps, and his feet into a pair of embroidered slippers. *(during the above, she has kept on banging the paper parcels)* Yes; embroidered, no doubt, by some unhappy creature he had professed to me as he did me. *(walking away in an excited manner—WOODCOCK immediately opens table drawer, and thrusts in one of the parcels, there not being room for the other, WOODCOCK hastily thrusts it up under his waistcoat in front)*

MRS. C. What is the matter?

WOOD. Nothing!

MRS. C. Such, Marmy, was my married life for twenty years. Anxious, therefore, that Caroline should escape my wretched fate, I resolved to find her a husband who, like herself, had never enjoyed what is called "Life."

WOOD. And you pitched upon me!

MRS. C. I did; every enquiry I made about you convinced me you were the very man I was looking for. "He is no second Carver," said I, "he is not satiated with the pleasures, the gaieties, the amusements of the world," said I, "he has never even tasted them," said I, "and therefore," said I, "he'll be the more ready to plunge headlong into the dazzling and intoxicating scene before him," said I.

WOOD. Did you?

MRS. C. Yes! "Caroline will plunge in with him," said I, "and I—I shall plunge in after both of them," said I.

WOOD. You?

MRS. C. Of course! *(with increasing animation)* Haven't I to make up the twenty years I lost with Carver? yes, and what's more, I mean to make them up! Yes, Marmy! balls, concerts, operas, assemblies, masquerades, regattas, races!—wherever you are, there will I be! wherever you go, there will I go. Oh, how I long to begin! how I pant to mingle in "the gay, the gay, the festive scenes—the halls, the halls of dazzling light," and sport the light fantastic toe in the merry, joyous dance! *(dancing a few steps)*

WOOD. *(after a stare of astonishment)* Dance? •

woman of her substance! she couldn't do it! (*aloud*) I'm only afraid, my very dear Mrs. Carver, that "light fantastic toe" of yours won't have much to do in our quiet little town of Stow-on-the-Wold!

MRS. C. Stow-on-the-Wold? Faugh! I'm speaking of London!

WOOD. (*with a start*) London?

MRS. C. Yes! Where we shall be this very evening. Yes, Marmy, that's the little agreeable surprise we had in store for you, ha, ha, ha!

WOOD. (*aside*) Now, Woodcock, prove yourself a man, Woodcock—assert your dignity, Woodcock—and let Carver see you're not going to stand any of Carver's nonsense, Woodcock! (*aloud and drawing himself up*) Mrs. Lieutenant Colonel Carver—(*thrusting his hand in his waistcoat, the paper parcel shews itself below it—WOODCOCK hastily thrusts it up again*) I repeat, Mrs. Lieutenant Colonel Carver—

MRS. C. I know what you are going to say, Marmy, but don't be alarmed! we've settled everything without you—in short, you'll have nothing whatever to do except to supply the money—there!

WOOD. (*still more dignified*) Mrs. Lieutenant Colonel Carver—(*here the parcel again appears below his waistcoat—he thrusts it up so violently that it shews itself above it under his chin*)

MRS. C. In the first place that kindest, best of creatures, Mrs. Larkings has already secured apartments for us close to their own residence in the Regent's Park, eight guineas and a half a week, the cheapest thing I ever heard of!

WOOD. Mrs. Lieutenant Colonel Carver—

MRS. C. Especially as it includes everything except plate, linen, firing and attendance; but that's not all, Marmy, she vows she'll not accept a single invitation unless we are included! When I say we, I mean Caroline, Marmy and me! (*playfully and skipping about, R.*)

WOOD. (*aside—after a savage look at her*) There are circumstances under which a man ought to be allowed to strangle his mother-in-law!

MRS. C. Ah! here comes Caroline, already equipped for travelling!

Enter MRS. WOODCOCK, R. 2 E., *in travelling costume.*

Come here, my darling—there! (*pointing to* WOODCOCK, *who is looking very sulky*) Look at him, isn't he the very picture of happiness? Doesn't his very eye twinkle with delight?

MRS. W. Yes. And if I were not so happy myself, I should scold you well, sir, for keeping this charming, delightful visit to London a secret from me. (*playfully shaking her finger at* WOODCOCK, *who tries to get up a smile*)

MRS. C. He knew nothing about it, my dear; he's quite as agreeably surprised as you are—ain't you, Marmy?

WOOD. (*sulkily*) Yes; of course.

MRS. W. Why, what a serious tone you say it in!

WOOD. Do I? (*shouting*) I'm delighted! enchanted! There—is that better?

MRS. W. (C.) Yes, much better. (*suddenly*) I see how it is—this arrangement of mamma's may have interfered with some plan of your own—perhaps you intended taking us to Switzerland?

WOOD. (*quickly*) No, no!

MRS. C. (*knowingly*, R.) No, my dear; if Marmy had taken us anywhere it would have been to Italy.

WOOD. (*still more quickly*, L.) No, no, no; in short, I wish it to be distinctly understood, that having already paid two visits to the——

MRS. C. (*interrupting*) Yes, yes; never mind, Marmy, if you are a good boy, you shall take us to Italy next year! We'll climb up Mount Vesuvius together, Marmy—to the very top, Marmy! (*with enthusiasm*)

WOOD. (*aside, after a savage look at her*) Only let me once get her there, and I'll plunge her headforemost into the crater.

MRS. C. In the meantime let us only think of London.

MRS. W. Yes, dear; delightful London! Remember, this is my first visit to the Metropolis! You have been there, I suppose? (*to* WOODCOCK)

WOOD. (*forgetting himself*) Ha, ha! I should rather think I have—I mean, I've passed through it once or twice.

MRS. C. Yes; but only on business.

WOOD. Of course—only on business. (*aside*) What an atrocious humbug I am!

MRS. C. And therefore it will be quite as much a novelty to him as to you.

WOOD. Yes. (*aside*) Novelty! to a man who has had twenty years of it! I'm in for it—I'm booked for a second innings. Never mind: there's *one* point on which they'll find me firm and immovable as Gibraltar itself, and that is, that having already paid two visits to the——

Enter MRS. LARKINGS *in travelling dress, door R. 2 E.*

MRS. L. (R. C.) Well, good people? but I needn't ask—I see by your happy faces (WOODCOCK *puts on a grin*) that my plan of the campaign has met with universal approbation.

MRS. C. (R.) Yes, we're all charmed with it! Mr. Woodcock especially! he positively can't find words to express his delight!

MRS. L. (L. C.) Is it to be wondered at, that having hitherto led so calm, so tranquil, so sedate a life, (*looking with intention at* WOODCOCK) he should long to taste the forbidden fruit? ha, ha! My only fear is, that when he once begins there'll be no stopping him! ha, ha, ha!

WOOD. (L.) Ha, ha, ha! (*making a savage face at* MRS. LARKINGS, *aside*)

MRS. L. Here, ladies, is a programme I have drawn up of your first three weeks' "Life in London," (*showing a paper*) an incessant, unflagging whirl of dissipation, I promise you. By-the-bye, I quite forgot to mention that Mr. Larkings has placed his riding horses at your disposal.

MRS. C. How delightful! I long to be in the saddle.

WOOD. (*aside, and looking at* MRS. CARVER) She'll never stop in it unless she's tied in, she's too round, she'll roll off, to a certainty!

MRS. W. (*to* MRS. LARKINGS) And can you, will you indeed fulfil all your delightful promises?

MRS. L. Yes! not only those I have made to you, but to Mr. Woodcock, (*with intention, and then aside to* WOODCOCK) namely, not to strip the "Wild Woodcock" of his borrowed plumes—not to betray him to a certain

lady who turns "very red in the face at the merest trifle," provided he promises to think less of himself, and more of his wife; in other words, that he consents to exchange programmes. (*after some hesitation, WOODCOCK draws his programme out of his pocket, looks imploringly at MRS. LARKINGS, who shakes her head—he then gives her his programme, and snatching hers out of her hand, thrusts it angrily into his pocket*)

Enter DAVID, door, R. 2 E.

DAVID. (*announcing*) The wedding breakfast be all ready for the company, and the company be all ready for the wedding breakfast!

MRS. C. Come along! a mouthful of wedding cake and a bumper of champagne to the health of the bride and bridegroom, and then—hey for London! (*DAVID looks very much astonished*) Now, Marmy, your arm to Mrs. Larkings.

WOOD. (L. C.) Yes—one moment! (*taking DAVID aside*) David, my stock of dress coats, ditto trowsers, white neckcloths and patent leather boots, that I made you a present of—

DAVID. (L.) Yes, sir, 'cause you said you had done with them.

WOOD. I thought I had—but I haven't! I want them again, David, for my "second innings." David, (*making a wry face*) you can have the morning gowns, caps and slippers instead. (*stopping DAVID who is about to exclaim*) Hush! the morning gowns and caps you'll find in that drawer, (*pointing to table*) and—(*looking towards the LADIES*)—here are the slippers! (*pulling out the parcel from under his waistcoat and slipping it into DAVID's hands*)

MRS. C. (*impatiently*) Now, Marmy! (*they go off, R. 2 E.*)

WOOD. Coming! (*runs up to join the LADIES—pitches the parcel to DAVID, who stands in a state of wonder*)

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE.—*Handsomely furnished Apartment at Mr. Larkings'. Large folding doors at C., shewing Ball-room within illuminated and decorated; handsome clock, with practical hands, R. C.; dance music heard from inner room, when door is open; doors, R. and L. Very loud double knock heard.*

MAID. (*outside*) This way if you please, ladies.

Enter MRS. CARVER and MRS. WOODCOCK, at L., preceded by LADY'S MAID—the LADIES are both in very fashionable evening costume, opera cloaks, &c., &c.

MRS. C. (*as she enters, and turning to wing*) Now, Mr. Woodcock, we're waiting for you.

WOOD. (*without*) Here I am, Mrs. Carver.

Enter WOODCOCK, L., he has a crush hat on, a shawl round his neck, an Inverness cape, and carries a large bouquet in each hand—he is also in an elaborate evening dress.

MRS. C. At last! I thought you were never coming!

WOOD. (*who looks miserable and in a sulky tone*) You wouldn't have me rush into a gentleman's drawing room as if I'd got a wild bull at my heels?

MAID. Allow me, madam. (*taking off Mrs. Woodcock's cloak*)

MRS. C. Now, Marmy, make yourself useful! (*motioning him to take off her cloak*)

WOOD. Eh? oh, I know! (*taking hold of Mrs. Carver's cloak behind and giving it a violent tug*)

MRS. C. How clumsy you are to be sure! (*MAID assists in taking off her cloak*)

MAID. Here's the ticket, madam. (*presenting ticket*)

WOOD. Wait a minute, young woman! (*putting both the bouquets under his arm*)

MRS. C. What are you doing? (*taking the bouquets and arranging them*)

WOOD. (*to MAID*) Here's my hat—here's my comforter—here's my Inverness cape—(*giving the articles to her*)—and, now, give me a ticket for the lot?

MAID. Here it is, sir, No. 81. (*giving ticket*)

WOOD. 81? it's 18!

MAID. No, sir, you've got it upside down! (MAID goes out with things, R.)

WOOD. I see! One's obliged to be particular, because at the very last dinner party I was at, I got a ticket No. 9 in exchange for a bran-new brown silk umbrella; and when I asked for my bran-new brown silk umbrella in exchange for ticket No. 9, they told me that ticket No. 9 was ticket No. 6, and handed me one American overshoe and a walking stick.

MRS. W. Do, mamma, arrange the flowers in my coronet.

MRS. C. They're all right, my dear; that's more than I can say for my dress! only see how Marmy has rumbled it! (*smoothing dress*)

WOOD. (C.) Me? come, I like that! considering I had to ride outside, if I rumbled any body, it must have been the coachman!

MRS. C. Now, my dear, I think we may venture into the ball room!

MRS. W. Without our fans and gloves, mamma?

MRS. C. Marmy has got them.

WOOD. (L.) Eh? yes. (*feeling in his pockets*) No, I haven't.

MRS. C. Nonsense, you put them in your pocket, you must have them somewhere about you!

WOOD. If I have, they must have slipped down into my boots! Would you like me to take off my boots? (*sulkily*)

MRS. C. I dare say you've dropped them.

WOOD. No, I'm positive I didn't drop them. (*aside*) I flung 'em away!

MRS. C. How careless of you! what's to be done?

WOOD. Well, it strikes me there's only one thing to be done—go home again. (*hurrying to door, R., and calling out*) Ticket No. 18! No. 81! two opera cloaks, one hat, one comforter, one Inverness cape.

Enter MRS. LARKINGS, at C., in fashionable evening dress.

—LADIES and GENTLEMEN are seen promenading within

—Music)

MRS. L. (*seeing the ladies*) Ah! you've arrived at last, I quite began to despair of you.

WOOD. (*still at door R., he has got the two opera cloaks, the hat, and the comforter, and is holding up and examining an Inverness cape*) Holloa! this isn't my Inverness cape! I'll take my oath this is not my Inverness cape!

MRS. L. Why! What is Mr. Woodcock about?

MRS. W. (*plaintively*) Getting our things together to go home! He's either lost or mislaid our fans and gloves!

MRS. L. What of that! I can supply you with no end of fans, and dozens of pairs of gloves!

MRS. C. } Oh, thank you—thank you!

MRS. W. }

(WOODCOCK, who overhears this, rolls all the things together in a lump and flings them back into the room with disgust)

MRS. L. But what makes you so late?

MRS. C. Oh! it was entirely Marmy's fault.

WOOD. (*sulkily*) Of course—of course it was Marmy's fault!

MRS. W. You can't deny it, Mr. Woodcock. You must know—(*to MRS. LARKINGS*)—that I had bought this coronet expressly for your ball to-night, but when I wanted it to put it on, it had disappeared! (*Mrs. LARKINGS looks aside at WOODCOCK—puts on a look of innocence*)

MRS. C. Yes! We hunted for it everywhere. At last where do think it was found? In Marmy's writing desk! ha, ha, ha!

WOOD. (*forcing a loud laugh*) Ha, ha, ha!

MRS. C. Poor fellow! he remembered afterwards putting it there to prevent its being lost.

WOOD. (*very quickly*) Yes!

MRS. L. Indeed! (*looking at WOODCOCK*) Some people might imagine it was to prevent its being found!

MRS. C. and MRS. W. (*&c.*) Oh, no—no!

WOOD. Oh, no—no! (*aside*) As I have observed two or three times already, what Larkings could ever have seen in that woman—

Enter DAVID, at L., as a page.

DAVID. Please, sir, coachman says you didn't tell him what time he's to come with the carriage.

MRS. W. (R.) Now, remember, Mr. Woodcock, you promised me faithfully that we shouldn't be late—say half past two.

WOOD. Very well! (to DAVID) A quarter past two.

MRS. W. I said, half-past! (smiling)

WOOD. (shouting, &c.) Half-past! *Exit DAVID, L.*

MRS. C. Yes! We really must have a good night's rest, or we shall not be fit for the fancy dress ball to-morrow. (to MRS. LARKINGS) we've settled our costume, my dear! Caroline is going as Little Red Riding Hood, Marmy as a Neapolitan brigand—(WOODCOCK *makes a wry face*)—and I—à la *Pompadour*!

WOOD. (aside) I don't exactly know what a *pumpadour* is, but I hope it's something decent! (*dance music again heard*)

MRS. L. Come, ladies! by-the-bye, I mustn't forget your fans and gloves—this way! you'll find us in the ball room in less than five minutes, Mr. Woodcock, this way.

Exeunt MRS. LARKINGS, MRS. CARVER, and MRS.

WOODCOCK *at door, C. to L.—door closed.*

WOOD. That attempt of mine upon Mrs. Woodcock's coronet was a contemptible failure. (yawning) I wonder if I shall ever have a good night's rest again! Never mind, I'll make up for it when I get back to Stow-on-the-Wold—if ever I do get back; I won't get up for a month! I believe Mrs. Woodcock would go back if it wasn't for Carver. I wish somebody would marry Carver! I'll give any man a thousand pounds if he'll marry—and after all, Carver's not absolutely repulsive—and I'm sure there's plenty of her for the money.

Enter SWANSDOWN *in evening dress at C. from L.*

SWANS. (going to door R., and taking ticket out of his pocket) Ticket No. 37. (MAID appears, takes ticket, and disappears)

WOOD. Why, that's Swansdown! he's actually giving up his ticket!

SWANS. (seeing WOODCOCK) Ah, Woodcock! how d'ye do? (receiving a hat and cloak from MAID, and coming forward putting them on) That'll do! Good night, Woodcock! (*crosses to L.*)

ACT 2.] WOODCOCK'S LITTLE GAME.

WOOD. Stop a bit! you don't mean to say you're going home, Swansdown?

SWANS. Of course I am! I ought to have been in bed two hours ago. (*yawning*)

WOOD. So ought I! (*yawning*) I say, Swansdown, how do you manage it?

SWANS. Manage what?

WOOD. To go home without Mrs. Swansdown?

SWANS. I leave her behind!

WOOD. Exactly—but—how do you manage to leave her behind?

SWANS. I go home without her!

WOOD. I see!

SWANS. Good night! (*going*)

WOOD. (*stopping him again*) Don't be in a hurry!

SWANS. I am so sleepy! (*yawning*)

WOOD. So am I. (*yawning*)

SWANS. The fact is, Woodcock, (*yawning*, WOODCOCK *does the same*) before I got married, I had seen a good deal of this sort of fun. (*yawning very loud*)

WOOD. So had I! (*yawning very loud*)

SWANS. In short, I married, not to go out, but to stop at home! (*yawning*)

WOOD. (*yawning*) So did I! but how do you manage it?

SWANS. Manage what?

WOOD. Why, to stop at home?

SWANS. I don't go out!

WOOD. Exactly—but how do you manage to “don't go out?”

SWANS. I stop at home.

WOOD. I see!

SWANS. I hit on a very simple plan! I had a regular stock of sudden indispositions to meet every invitation that came in; headaches, rheumatisms, lumbagoes, &c., &c., Mrs. Swansdown grumbled a good deal at first, but she soon got used to it, and——

WOOD. (*suddenly grasping SWANSDOWN'S hand, and shaking it violently*) Thank you, Swansdown! I'm obliged to you, Swansdown! good night, Swansdown. (*stopping him again*) One moment—when you married Mrs. Swansdown, had she got a Carver?

WOODCOCK

SWANS. A what?

WOOD. A Carver—I mean, a mother?

SWANS. No!

WOOD. Never mind! Good night, Swansdown! Go home to bed, Swansdown!

Exit SWANSDOWN, L.

I'll try it! I will, by Jove! there's that horrible fancy dress ball to-morrow night! what "sudden indisposition" shall I have—I've had the measles——

Enter LARKINGS at c. in very fashionable evening costume.

LARK. (R. C., seeing WOODCOCK) Ah, Woodcock! All alone, eh? I'm afraid you're not enjoying yourself?

WOOD. (L. C.) Yes, I am—in a quiet way!

LARK. Delightful party, eh? By-the-bye—I congratulate you—your wife is really a very nice sort of person—very nice, indeed! (in a patronizing tone) but her dancing has been sadly neglected. However, make yourself easy, I've engaged her for the next three polkas on purpose to teach her the proper step!

WOOD. Have you?

LARK. After that I'm engaged to Mrs. Swansdown for the rest of the evening. Swansdown's gone home as usual! ha, ha! poor Swansdown! "when the cat's away," you know, eh? ha, ha!

WOOD. (drawing himself up) Mr. Christopher Larkings!

LARK. Come, come, Woodcock—that grave face won't do with me, besides, it isn't because I flirt with my friend's wives that I love them! I flirt with yours, but I don't love her, at least, not yet! ha, ha! but I say, old fellow, don't follow Swansdown's example—what can a man on the wrong side of forty expect if he will go home to bed and leave a pretty young wife behind him, eh? ha, ha! (poking WOODCOCK in the side)

WOOD. Sir! my friend, Swansdown, has too much confidence——

LARK. (laughing) Of course he has, that's the delicious part of it, ha, ha! I say, Woodcock. (taking his arm, and aside to him) I don't mind telling you—and after all, I meant no harm—but when Mrs. Larkings went down to your wedding at—what d'ye call the place—Toad in the Hole——

WOOD. Stow-on-the-Wold, sir! (*with dignity*)

LARK. No matter! well, I suddenly remarked what a fascinating person she was——

WOOD. Mrs. Larkings?

LARK. No, Mrs. Swansdown! I used to say all sorts of stupid things to her——

WOOD. That I'll be bound to say you *did*; well, there's no great harm in that!

LARK. No, but that's not all—not that I meant any harm—well, after a luncheon of grilled chicken and champagne, this afternoon—I don't know how the deuce it happened, but I've a sort of stupid, misty recollection of writing a stupid sort of letter, full of doves and loves, and Cupid's darts and bleeding hearts—you know what I mean—which letter, I'm under a very strong impression, Mrs. Swansdown will find on her dressing table when she gets home to-night.

WOOD. Mr. Larkings!

LARK. Yes, yes, it was a stupid thing to do, I know, and I heartily wish I had the confounded letter back, but it's too late now, and after all, I meant no harm. (*polka music heard*) There's the polka! I mustn't keep Mrs. Woodcock waiting. Good bye! (*going*)

WOOD. Stop!

LARKINGS runs out at c. to L.
Catch me leaving Mrs. Woodcock alone for a single moment! No, no, I'll stick to her like her shadow. I'll revel in Redowas! I'll plunge into polkas! I'll have a shy at the sausages—I mean Schottisches! (*here the polka music becomes louder*) I don't half like my wife's skipping about with that fellow now; if I could only manage to get her away. (*looking at clock, which is in a conspicuous part of the stage*) Only a quarter past one. (*after a short pause*) That clock's too slow. (*lounging up stage, assuming an unconcerned manner and humming a tune—when near the clock, looks right and left, then jumps up into a chair, puts the clock on one hour, and jumps off chair again—then taking out his watch*) Hey-day! my watch is an hour too slow by that clock, and I know there isn't a better clock in England. (*putting his watch on an hour, then hastily thrusting it into his pocket, aside*) Just in time!

Enter MRS. WOODCOCK, at c. from L.

MRS. W. Still here, my dear? Why don't you come into the ball-room?

WOOD. I will presently—there's plenty of time! It's quite early yet! (*seeing that he is standing between MRS. WOODCOCK and the clock, moves aside*) I repeat, it's quite early yet! (*pointedly, and looking at clock*)

MRS. W. (*seeing clock*) Eh? Can it be possible? Twenty minutes past two?

WOOD. Oh! that clock's too fast! Look here! (*taking out his watch*) Holloa! Why it's half-past two! That clock's too slow.

MRS. W. How the time slips away!

WOOD. Yes! the last hour's gone remarkably fast.

Music—some five or six couples, including MRS. LARKINGS and MRS. CARVER, come in at c., dancing the polka—the last couple consisting of MRS. CARVER and a very YOUNG MAN—polka ceases.

WOOD. (*who has gone to door, L.*) Ticket No. 81—two opera cloaks—a hat—a comforter—an Inverness cape!

MRS. C. Why! What is Marmy about? (*to MRS. WOODCOCK*)

MRS. W. Look at the clock, mamma!

MRS. C. Half-past two!

Enter LARKINGS, at c. from L.

LARK. What's that? Half-past two? No such thing, gentlemen—I appeal to you! Out with your watches! (*LARKINGS and GENTLEMEN take out their watches—each presenting his to his LADY*)

LARK. }
GENTS. } Half-past one!

MRS. W. Another hour! Delightful!

MRS. C. Charming! (*polka music resumed*) Mrs. Woodcock, allow me. (*polka—MRS. CARVER seizing her former partner and whirling him out after the others, at c. to L.*)

WOOD. (*who has been standing looking on with the opera cloaks, &c., &c., in his arms—dashes them down in a*

lump on the stage) That's a failure! Then I won't go home at all! I'll sleep here! (*seizing up the cloaks, &c., and dashing them one after the other on the sofa, L. C., and then throwing himself upon them*) There! (*burying his head in the pillow*) This is very comfortable——

SWANSDOWN *hurries in, at L., very pale and excited.*

SWANS. (*as he enters*) Woodcock! Woodcock! (*seeing him on sofa*) Ah, there he is! (*shaking him*) Woodcock, get up!

WOOD. (*jumping up*) Halloo, Swansdown, come back again!

SWANS. (*with a savage grin, R.*) Yes! ha, ha, ha! (*with a forced laugh*)

WOOD. (L.) Don't make such dreadful faces! What's the matter?

SWANS. Matter? (*furiously and grimacing*)

WOOD. Don't grind your teeth in that horrible way. Recollect they're not your own!

SWANS. Listen! (*grasping Woodcock's arm*) On my return home, I found Mrs. Swansdown's maid in Mrs. Swansdown's room fast asleep! Something was lying on the dressing table! It was a letter!

WOOD. (*aside*) Larkings's billet!

SWANS. Yes! A letter for Mrs. Swansdown, from—from—fiends and furies!

WOOD. I don't know either of the gentlemen.

SWANS. From Larkings! Christopher Larkings! There was no signature; but I knew the handwriting! It was a declaration—a declaration! Don't you hear? (*shouting*)

WOOD. Yes—yes! Well!

SWANS. I rushed into my library—opened my desk—took out my duelling pistols—put them in my pocket, and—here I am! (*savagely and walking to and fro*)

WOOD. (*following him*) Pistols? Oh, I say, Swansdown—Swansdown! Oh, I say!

SWANS. (*stopping suddenly*) Larkings dies!

WOOD. Yes; but don't—don't go and cut him off in the flower of his polka—I mean, his youth!

SWANS. Ah! here comes Mrs. Larkings! She shall know all!

Enter MRS. LARKINGS, at C. from L.

WOOD. No—no! (*holding SWANSDOWN back, who tries to join MRS. LARKINGS*)

MRS. L. (R.) Still here, Mr. Swansdown, then I shall claim you for my partner in the polka!

WOOD. (*aside to SWANSDOWN*) A thousand pardons, madam—

MRS. L. Refuse a lady? Fie—nay, I insist upon it!

(*polka music without — SWANSDOWN begins very unwillingly to dance with MRS. LARKINGS—WOODCOCK anxiously following them and dancing a polka steps after them*)

MRS. L. (*while dancing*) Besides, Mr. Larkings is dancing with Mrs. Swansdown!

SWANS. Ah! (*polking savagely*)

MRS. L. Yes, fourth time to-night!

WOOD. (*still dancing after them, and aside to MRS. SWANSDOWN*) Don't tell him that, mum—don't tell him that!

MR. L. Luckily, I'm not jealous! Christopher is constancy itself!

SWANS. (*savagely*) Is he? Ha, ha!

WOOD. (*still dancing after them, and aside to SWANSDOWN*) Hush, Swansdown, hush!

MRS. L. Yes, any woman has my full permission to wean Christopher's affections from me, if she can!

WOOD. (*still polking by their side, and aside to MRS. LARKINGS*) Don't aggravate him, mum—don't aggravate him!

SWANS. Indeed! What if I place in your hands the proof of your husband's infidelity?

WOOD. (*same play*) Hush, Swansdown!

MRS. L. Ha, ha! I defy you!

WOOD. (*same play*) Don't defy him, mum, don't defy him.

SWANS. Indeed! then that proof shall be in your hands in half an hour.

WOOD. (*same play*) Hush, Swansdown!

SWANS. A letter! a declaration! addressed to my wife by—your husband!

MRS. L. (*suddenly stopping*) Christopher unfaithful!

Support me! (*falling into WOODCOCK'S arms, who quite bewildered goes on dancing the polka*)

Enter MRS. CARVER, C. from L.

MRS. C. (*seeing MRS. LARKINGS in WOODCOCK'S arm*)
Ah! Support me! (*falling into WOODCOCK'S other arm, who, still more bewildered, unconsciously keeps up a polka step*)

Enter LARKINGS, C. from L.

LARK. Ah! (*about to run to MRS. LARKINGS*)

SWANS. (*stopping him*) One moment! (*drags him forward—then, savagely aside to him*) We must fight, sir. I know all! all!

LARK. (*aside*) The devil! (*aloud*) Well, sir, to-morrow morning!

SWANS. No! Now! Now! it's a moonlight night! Primrose Hill close at hand, and I've pistols in my pocket! Woodcock! (*to WOODCOCK, who has placed MRS. LARKINGS and MRS. CARVER each in a chair and is fanning them alternately, still dancing a polka step—SWANSDOWN goes up, seizes WOODCOCK by the arm, and drags him down—aside to him*) You'll be my second? I'm going to shoot Larkings!

LARK. (*grasping WOODCOCK'S other arm*) You'll be my second? I'm going to shoot Swansdown!

SWANS. } Come!
LARK. }

They drag WOODCOCK out between them at L., WOODCOCK struggling, &c.

MRS. C. (*who recovers and runs to MRS. LARKINGS*)
My dear Mrs. Larkings, look up, there's a dear creature.

MRS. L. Oh, oh, oh! (*sobbing*) I'm the most miserable woman in the world!

MRS. C. (*soothingly*) So you shall be, there! but what has happened?

MRS. L. (C.) My husband—Christopher has written a love letter to Mrs. Swansdown! Oh, the base, fickle, perfidious monster!

MRS. C. (R.C.) My dear friend, never indulge in a plurality of epithets; select one, a good one, and stick to it! I

never called Carver anything but a brute! But are you sure?

MRS. L. Quite certain! Mr. Swansdown has promised to send me the letter in half an hour; if it contains the proof of Christopher's inconstancy, oh, what shall I do?

MRS. C. Nothing, 'till Mr. Swansdown has sent you the letter—

MRS. L. Very well! I'll wait 'till the half hour has expired—patiently, very patiently, (*tearing her handkerchief*) if the letter doesn't come, I'll go to Mr. Swansdown for it—yes—late as it is, I will! and you'll go with me, won't you? (*imploringly*)

MRS. C. Yes, we'll go together; in the meantime, come with me into the ball room—everybody has doubtless left by this time, and you'll find a glass or two of sherry and a few sponge cakes a great support in your affliction. Come!

Exeunt at C. to L.—MRS. CARVER supporting MRS.

LARKINGS, at the same moment the door, L., slowly opens, and WOODCOCK peeps in, then speaks off.

WOOD. The coast is clear; you can come in.

Enter LARKINGS with his right arm in a sling—SWANSDOWN following, evidently very much out of temper—takes a chair, bangs it down on stage, and falls into it, L.

LARK. (R., *pressing his right arm*) How confoundedly painful my arm is.

WOOD. (C., *soothingly*) Yes! I daresay it smarts a little!

SWANS. (*dashing his hat down on stage*) I'm disgusted! yes, disgusted that this stupid ridiculous duel should have occurred! (*to LARKINGS*) Why the deuce didn't you tell me you were sorry for what you'd done—that you meant no harm? my feelings wouldn't have been wounded!

LARK. (*pressing his wounded arm*) Nor mine either! but that's not the worst of it—if Mrs. Larkings discovers what has taken place, do you know what she'll do? she'll leave London and bury me alive in the country for the rest of my existence.

WOOD. (*aside*) Good gracious! I wonder if Mrs. Woodcock would serve me the same if I were to—by jingo! it's worth thinking about. (*aloud*) But how is

Mrs Larkings to know anything about it? *I* shan't betray you—Swansdown won't—you ~~won't~~ betray yourself?

LARK. No; but my wounded arm will! besides there's that unlucky letter of mine, which Swansdown has promised to send to my wife.

SWANS. (*producing letter*) Here it is. If I *don't* send it, what can I say?

WOOD. (*taking the letter*) Say? why—that you made a mistake in the handwriting—that it wasn't Larkings's after all!—but somebody else's!—anybody's—(*suddenly*)—*Mine!*

LARK. *and* } Yours?
SWANS. }

WOOD. Yes! What's the consequence? When it's known that you and I have been fighting, no one will imagine it's on account of Mrs. Swansdown; consequently her reputation will be saved!

SWANS. True! but zounds then! what have we been fighting about?

WOOD. Eh? oh, for the fun of the thing! or else some difference of opinion—(*suddenly*)—the war in America! that's the very thing! you're for the Federates! I'm for the Confederals!—that'll do famously—it'll save *you* (*to SWANSDOWN*) from being laughed at; *you* (*to LARKINGS*) from being buried alive in the country.

SWANS. }
LARK. } And you?

WOOD. Never mind me. Woodcock's got a little game of his own. (*aside*) It's a capital idea—a sublime idea! (*to SWANSDOWN*) Now go home; and spread the report of our duel right and left; mention it at your butcher's, baker's, and candlestick maker's—in short everywhere; and don't forget you're a Confederate—I mean—never mind; go along.

SWANSDOWN *hurries out at L.*

LARK. But I say, what the deuce is to become of me in the matter?

WOOD. Eh? I have it; you've been my second.

LARK. Very well; then I can go to Mrs. Larkings.

WOOD. Yes. Stop! take that sling off.

LARK. Well, but——

WOOD. Take it off, I say!

LARK. (*taking off sling and putting his arm in his waistcoat, with evident pain*) There! and now give me that confounded letter of mine.

WOOD. Oh dear, no! I can't spare that. (*taking letter out of envelope and reading*) "To see you is to love you." (*aside*) And to think I've got to copy such twaddle as that. (*listening*) Hark! I hear some one. You know what you've got to do; don't go and make a mess of it. (*aside*) And I got married to settle down quietly—it looks like it! Never mind; Woodcock's got his little game!
Hurries out at L.

Enter MRS. LARKINGS and MRS. CARVER, C.

LARK. (*assuming an air of unconcern*) Ah, my dear!

MRS. L. (*R.—extending her arm*) Keep your distance, sir. I know all—all! In a word, I am now going to Mr. Swansdown's—you hear—to Mr. Swansdown's, for a certain letter—a love letter, sir, written by you to Mrs. Swansdown.

LARK. (*C.*) By me! Ha, ha, ha! I should like to see it. Go and fetch it, my dear; why don't you go for it, my love? Tra, la, la! (*humming a tune*)

Enter DAVID, L.

DAVID. (*to MRS. LARKINGS*) Please, ma'am. (*aside*) Don't let me forget what master told me to say. (*aloud*) Here be a letter, ma'am, from Mr. Swan—Swan——

MRS. L. (*eagerly*) Swansdown? give it me? (*snatching letter from DAVID, but keeping her eyes fixed on LARKINGS, who tries to appear unconcerned, and endeavours to get up a whistle*) You may go, David! *Exit DAVID, L.*

LARK. (*aside*) Woodcock's gone and bungled the business—I knew he would. (*MRS. LARKINGS tears open the envelope*) She's opened it; it's all over with me!

MRS. L. (*reading*) "To see you is to love you." (*suddenly*) Eh! can it be? yes! yes! (*with an exclamation of joy, and throwing her arms round LARKINGS*) Oh, my dear, darling Christopher!

LARK. (*suffering pain in his arm, and trying to disengage himself—aside*) Confound it! how she's hurting me?

MRS. C. What do you mean?

MRS. L. That I'm the happiest woman in the world—that Christopher is innocent! (*throws her arms again round him*)

LARK. Don't! don't!

MRS. C. Innocent?

MRS. L. Yes, as a lamb! the letter isn't in his handwriting—look! (*giving letter to MRS. C., and making another spring at LARKINGS, who keeps her off*)

MRS. C. (*reading letter*) "To see you is to——" (*suddenly, and with a violent scream*) Ah!

MRS. L. and LARK. (*startled*) What's the matter?

MRS. C. (*after a pause gives another louder scream*) Ah! the wretch! the monster!

MRS. L. Who? who?

MRS. C. Woodcock! the handwriting is *his*! (LARKINGS *laughs aside*) Ah! (*another loud scream*)

LARK. Hush! you'll alarm the neighbourhood.

MRS. C. (L.C.) I don't care—I must scream! I shall die if I don't scream! take me somewhere where I can scream!

MRS. L. Hush! for Caroline's sake.

MRS. C. True! she must know nothing—and yet I must scream. I'll go out in the street and scream.

MRS. L. Hush! had you not better take poor Caroline home on some pretext or other!

MRS. C. I will! and then I'll come back and kill Woodcock. I'll send for a cab this moment!

MRS. L. Pray be cautious.

MRS. C. I will! but I shall suffocate if I don't scream—I have it—I'll scream in the cab! (*hurries out, c.*)

MRS. L. (*with an imploring look at LARKINGS*) Oh, can you forgive me?

LARK. (*in a patronizing tone*) Yes, yes!

MRS. L. Dearest, best of Christophers— (*suddenly embracing him again*)

LARK. Don't! don't!

MRS. L. How could I suspect you? but isn't this dreadful conduct of Mr. Woodcock's! actually before the honeymoon is over!

LARK. Very shocking, indeed.

MRS. L. The man ought to be put in the pillory!

LARK. At the very least.

MRS. L. Ah! (*tenderly*) you wouldn't deceive your fond confiding wife? (*affectionately putting her arm in his wounded one*)

LARK. (*making a grimace*) Not for the world!

Enter DAVID, L.

DAVID. (*in a flurried manner*) Oh please, ma'am, a policeman has just rang at our bell——

MRS. L. A policeman?

DAVID. Yes, ma'am; seeing we hadn't gone to bed, he called to say that as he was going over Primrose Hill, about a quarter of an hour ago (*LARKINGS pricks up his ears*) he picked up this card case, ma'am! (*LARKINGS hastily fumbles in all his pockets*)

LARK. (*aside*) Mine, by Jupiter!

DAVID. So he opens it, ma'am, and (*to LARKINGS who is making violent signs to him to hold his tongue*) What's the matter, sir? (*MRS. LARKINGS turns towards LARKINGS, who again tries to get up a whistle*)

MRS. L. But why bring it to our home?

DAVID. Because it's Mr. Larkings's card case, ma'am!

MRS. L. (*to LARKINGS, suspiciously*) So you've been to Primrose Hill, it seems?

LARK. (*bothered*) Yes—the fact is—the rooms were so hot—and—never having seen the sun set—I mean the moon rise—I—(*aside*) I'd better hold my tongue.

MRS. L. (*after a searching look at him*) Where did the man say he picked this card case up?

DAVID. Where the shooting took place, ma'am.

MRS. L. The shooting?

DAVID. Yes, ma'am. (*seeing LARKINGS again making signals to him*) Yes, sir! (*MRS. LARKINGS looks round and LARKINGS again assumes an air of unconcern*) He heard two shots, ma'am—bang, bang; and ran to the spot just in time to see three gentlemen walking off; and——

(*during this LARKINGS has been again repeating his signals to him*)

MRS. L. You can go, David.

Exit DAVID, at L.

ACT 2.]

WOODCOCK'S LITTLE GAME.

Larkings! (*eagerly to him*) what does this mean? Speak, Christopher—what has happened? (*grasping LARKINGS's arm, who makes a grimace*) Ah! you needn't explain; I see it all—there has been a duel?

LARK. (L.) Well——

MRS. L. (c.) Don't speak; between Mr. Swansdown and you.

LARK. No, no.

MRS. L. Who then? He believed that *you* wrote the letter to his wife?

LARK. Yes, yes.

MRS. L. And challenged you?

LARK. Yes, yes.

MRS. L. And you fought?

LARK. Yes—no, no.

MRS. L. Yes, yes—no, no. Explain! No! I see it all.

LARK. (*aside*) She's always seeing it all! (*crosses to R.*)

MRS. L. When you got on the ground, Mr. Woodcock, who was probably your second——

LARK. My second! yes—exactly.

MRS. L. Confessed that he was the real culprit——

LARK. (*quickly*) That's it.

MRS. L. And received Mr. Swansdown's fire——

LARK. In the arm.

MRS. L. Wounded! Mr. Woodcock wounded!

LARK. Yes. (*recollecting*) No; that is—— (*aside*) Zounds! nothing was said about *that*.

MRS. L. Poor Mr. Woodcock! Which arm was it?

LARK. Eh—why—the arm that held the sword!

MRS. L. The sword!

LARK. Yes—no, I mean the pistol! (*aside*) Now to find Woodcock, and put him on his guard. (*turns and sees WOODCOCK, who enters at L., with his left arm in a sling—aside*) Huzzah! he's got his arm in a sling!

MRS. L. (*looking at Woodcock, who comes slowly forward, as if very much ashamed of himself*) It is true, then. Unhappy man, I pity you!

WOOD. (*assuming a very penitential voice and manner*) I don't deserve it.

LARK. (*aside*) Confound it! he's got the wrong arm in

WOODCOCK'S LITTLE GAME. [ACT 2.

the sling! Ahem! (*making violent signs to WOODCOCK to change arms*)

MRS. L. (*looking at WOODCOCK*) Why, how's this? (*to LARKINGS*) You told me Mr. Woodcock's wound was in the right arm!

LARK. (*confused, R.*) Did I?

MRS. L. Yes—you distinctly said "the arm that held the pistol."

WOOD. (*very quietly, C.*) That's quite right! I'm a left-handed Woodcock.

MRS. L. (*L.*) It's very shocking! but there's something worse behind.

WOOD. (*looking behind him*) Where?

MRS. L. I mean that Mrs. Colonel Carver knows everything. She'll return immediately; when she's done screaming, your only hope is to plead guilty at once and sue for pardon for Caroline's sake—you know that's her tender point!

WOOD. I will! I'll throw myself at once upon her tender point.

MRS. C. (*without*) Don't tell me! I can't—I won't believe it!

Enter MRS. CARVER, *hurriedly, R., and sees WOODCOCK with his arm in the sling.*

MRS. C. (*assuming a very pathetic attitude*) Ah! it's true! (*screams and falls into chair, MRS. LARKINGS runs to her*—WOODCOCK and LARKINGS exchange winks and laugh)

MRS. L. (*to MRS. C.*) Hush! the arm is only slightly, very slightly wounded.

MRS. C. I know better! they'll have to amputate it! I shall have a one-armed son-in-law—a wretched, helpless cripple! (*suddenly to MRS. LARKINGS*) My dear friend, go to poor dear Caroline—don't leave her till I've had time to do all my screaming! I know I screamed in the cab, but not half enough! Go, go!

Exit MRS. LARKINGS, C., *followed by LARKINGS, who again exchanges winks, &c., with WOODCOCK.*

MRS. C. (*watching them out and then turning to WOODCOCK, who looks at her and then turns his head away as if ashamed of himself*) Am I awake? or is it a dream—

nightmare? No! there he stands—at least, all that is left of him. Oh, Marmy! (*sobbing loudly and burying her face in her handkerchief*)

WOOD. (R.) Oh, Carver! (*imitating MRS. CARVER*)

MRS. C. (*indignantly*) So, sir! Scarce ten days married to the sweetest, the gentlest of her sex, you actually have the audacity to indite a declaration of love to another woman—a married woman too! (*suddenly bursting again into sobbing*) Oh, Marmy!

WOOD. Oh, Carver! (*same play*)

MRS. C. (L.) I couldn't have believed it! (*ditto*)

WOOD. No, more could I! (*ditto*) You've done it, Carver! You *would* bring me to London, and what's the result?—that I'm a lost Woodcock. (*in a tone of pretended anguish*)

MRS. C. Oh, Marmy! (*sobbing very loud*)

WOOD. Oh, Carver! (*ditto*)

MRS. C. But no! you can't be utterly depraved in so short a time!

WOOD. Yes, I am! I feel I'm rapidly settling down into an atrocious profligate, and I can't help it! That's the melancholy part of it, I can't help it! You've done it, Carver, you *would* bring me to London!

MRS. C. Oh, Marmy! (*a fresh burst of sobbing*)

WOOD. Oh, Carver! (*ditto*)

MRS. C. (*suddenly*) There's only one thing to be done! go back at once to Stow-on-the-Wold, (*WOODCOCK winks, aside*) and there, with your dear Caroline——

WOOD. (*putting on a very excited manner*) It's too late now; if you had let me stop at Stow-on-the-Wold, I should have been perfectly satisfied with my "dear Caroline;" but you would bring me to London—you know you would, and what's the result? that one dear Caroline isn't enough for me! I must have a dozen—two dozen—three dozen "dear Carolines!" an unlimited quantity of "dear Carolines!!" (*very wildly*)

MRS. C. (*indignantly*) Silence! reprobate!

WOOD. Gently, Carver! gently! I'm not going to be bullied! dash my wig if I am!

MRS. C. Mr. Woodcock!

WOOD. I can't help it! You've done it, Carver! I

love!—I adore the whole sex! *You're a fine woman, Carver!—I love you!—Come to my arms, Carver! (making a rush open-armed at MRS. CARVER, who, alarmed, avoids him)*

MRS. C. (*alarmed*) The man's mad! I'm ashamed of you!

WOOD. So am I! But you would bring me to London! you know you would! (*trying again to throw his arms round her*)

MRS. C. Help!

Enter MAIDSERVANT, running, R.

Oh, Susan! (*running to her*)

WOOD. Oh, that's Susan, is it? Lovely Susan! embrace your Woodcock! (*rushes with open arms at SUSAN, who, alarmed, rushes out screaming*)

MRS. C. (*clasping her hands*) And this is my work!

WOOD. Yes, you've done it Carver! never mind; don't cry, old girl! (*throwing his arm round MRS. CARVER's neck*)

MRS. C. Oh, Marmy, Marmy, if you've any love for Caroline, leave this wicked, abominable, detestable town this very morning by the very first train, and go back to Stow-on-the-Wold—I implore! I entreat you!

WOOD. (*after a pretended struggle with himself, then smiling benignantly*) Carver, your tears have conquered! do with me as you will. (*throws himself into her arms and makes a wry face over her shoulder, then looking towards L.*) Swansdown! what the deuce can he want? (*retiring to back as SWANSDOWN enters, L.*)

SWANS. (*as he enters*) It's all right, Woodcock— (*seeing MRS. CARVER*) Madam—I—

MRS. C. Mr. Swansdown, I know all; your duel with my unhappy son-in-law—

SWANS. (*aside*) Bravo! she's on the wrong scent. (*aloud*) Well, madam, I presume I have as much right to sympathize with the Federals as he has with the Confederates?

WOOD. (*who has been trying to attract SWANSDOWN's notice by making signals*) He's made a mess of it! I knew he would.

MRS. C. Federals—Confederates! I see—a subterfuge to conceal the real cause of your quarrel. You may rely

on receiving a letter of apology—ample apology from Mr. Woodcock!

SWANS. Not till he's recovered the use of his right arm, I beg.

WOOD. (*behind*) Eh? of course; it was the *right* arm! (*taking his left arm out of the sling and inserting the right*)

MRS. C. The *right* arm, you mean the *left*. (WOODCOCK *changes arms again*)

SWANS. The *right*! I think I ought to know.

MRS. C. The *left*! I suppose I can believe my eyes.

SWANS. *Right*!

MRS. C. *Left*!

SWANS. *Right*! } (*louder*)

MRS. C. *Left*! }

WOOD. (*who has kept on changing arms rapidly*) Oh, bother! there! (*stuffing both arms into the sling*)

Enter MRS. LARKINGS *hurriedly, at C. from L.*

MRS. L. (*running to* WOODCOCK) She's here—Caroline! she's heard of the duel; that you are wounded in the right arm—(WOODCOCK *who has both arms in the sling, draws out the left*) though of course I knew it was the left, (WOODCOCK *changes arms again*) when luckily—I don't know how it came into my head—I told her it was nother husband but mine who—she's here—don't undeceive her; but first off with this. (*dragging the sling violently off* WOODCOCK'S neck)

Enter MRS. WOODCOCK, *hurriedly, C. from L.*

MRS. W. (*running to* WOODCOCK) You are not wounded? it was not you then—Oh, I'm so happy! (*here* LARKINGS *appears at C.*)

MRS. L. (*seeing him, runs to him and slings the sling over his neck*) Hush, not a word! (*taking hold of his right arm and thrusting it violently into the sling*)

LARK. (*crying out with pain*) Oh!

MRS. L. (*aside to him*) That's right—pretend it hurts you! (*leading him down*) Here is the real culprit; but as he is sufficiently punished already, I forgive him. (*aside to* LARKINGS, *who is about to speak*) Hush! You'll have

to wear the sling for a week. I'll tell you why another time!

LARK. With all my heart. (*aside to WOODCOCK shaking his hand*) Thanks to you, my wife suspects nothing!

SWANS. (*aside to WOODCOCK, and shaking WOODCOCK's other hand*) Thanks to you, no one suspects mine!

WOOD. And thanks to both of you, (*shaking both their hands*) I'm going back to Stow-on-the-Wold—that is, if our kind friends assure us that success has crowned
"WOODCOCK'S LITTLE GAME!"

Curtain